Ethnic Jingoism, Religious Manipulation and the Politicization of Boko Haram

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Abstract

Indeed, without an iota of doubt, Boko-Haram has wreaked havoc to Nigerian state. Despite its coordinated attacks on state infrastructure and security agencies, it did not attract the attention of the public until it started to attack soft targets using small children as suicide bombers. The insurgents attack schools, churches, mosques (Masjid), and market places. The assassination of reputable Islamic preachers (like Ja'afar Mahmoud Adam and Muhammad Auwal Albani Zaria), and other community leaders demonstrates the tactics of the group to divert the attention of public from their objectives. It was not until the group detonated bomb in the United Nations building in Abuja, on August 2011 that the group received world attention. The operational tactics of the group led to many conflicting narratives about the Boko-Haram, its origins, driving force, and the best steps for solving the problem. These were all subjected to debate in both local and international media, among politicians, scholars, analysts and in daily discussions. Many studies suggest that poverty and deprivation, extremist ideology, struggle for power, greed, and elite machinations as the main causes of Boko-Haram violence. Using newspaper reports, secondary materials, documentary sources of data with content analysis as the main research technique, therefore, this study has found that external factors coupled with reluctance of some government functionaries, as well as conflict entrepreneurs complicated the phenomenon of Boko-Haram. In addition to politicisation of Boko-Haram and manipulation of religion, ethnicity and primordial sentiments make it difficult for government to devise clear strategies to deal with the actual problem. The speed with which the group developed its capability suggests outside help. Suggesting that Boko-Haram has allies in other global insurgency movements across the Sahel. It is the submission of this paper that the solution of the Boko-Haram lies in honestly and objectively studying the factors that led to its emergence and solving it in a manner intended to end it.

Keywords: Nigeria, Boko Haram, Ethnicity, Insurgency, Religion, Politicisation

Introduction

Nigeria as a country has witnessed and have continued to experience many organised violence since its independence in 1960. While politically and ethnically motivated crises are not new in the history of Nigeria's existence, inter and intra religious crises have always posed a serious threat to its corporate existence. Deliberate misrepresentation and politicisation of the real composition of Nigeria by some armchair writers and an attempt to deny others to practice their religion even where they are clearly the majority has continued to pose a serious challenge to the unity and development of the country. This can clearly be seen in both academic and news reporting such as Harnischfeger (2014), Mang, (2014), Africa research bulletin 19203 (2013) and Cook (2011). Shari'ah implementation by the muslim majority north is a clear agitation by the majority electorate to their elected leaders in the muslim north but, some scholars such as Cook (2011) contends that the move to impose Shari'ah in the northern Nigeria, was triggered by the election of President Olusegun Obasanjo, a Christian Southerner (1999 and 2003) and the perception that the muslim north was conceding power grounds to the Christian South (2011: 6). In another submission by Adesoji (2010), adoption and implementation of Shari'ah in northern Nigeria is an effort to pacify Muslims who had consistently agitated against the secular nature of the country and were seen either as a threat to the tenure of the political office-holders or as a support base that could not be neglected based on political reasons. In Islam there is no distinction between state and religion that is why majority of Muslim wanted to be governed within the principles of Shari'ah Law. Indeed, therefore, for them Shari'ah is a panacea for solving Nigeria's problems, especially corruption, moral decadence and lawlessness in the country. This is a clear misrepresentation of a people genuine right under a democratic dispensation to demand for their enshrined and protected right by the constitution. These views and many that are similar have been witnessed in various shari'ah and other related religious crises in the north western and central region since in the 1980s. The astronomical rise of these crises in recent times which transformed into an organised violence in the forms of insurgency and terrorism, like Boko-Haram and systematic cleansing of Muslims minority in the central part of Nigeria is a clear signing of existence of structural and institutional dysfunction in the country. These and other problems led to the labelling of the country as "the open sore of a continent" (Soyinka, 1997). Perhaps many beliefs that Boko-Haram emerged because of the internal contradiction and uncensored religion practices which became notorious in 2009, this violent has been depicted erroneously as a militant form of Islam in northern Nigeria. For these scholars Boko-Haram represent the latest and most violent expression of the movement of Shari'ah restoration in northern Nigeria. The violence is another movement for' … the full implementation of Shari'ah not only in the north but in the whole country...' (Adesoji, 2010). Additionally, Government and its agencies especially the police were said to consider the extrajudicial killings of Muhammed Yusuf as revenged considering how his sect members have brutally killed police officers in a cool blood (Segun, 2011). His perception might be because of response of former Gombe State Governor Danjuma Goje to him in respect of his view about the killing of Yusuf at the Villa and what he called the narrow escape of the army commander from dismissal for ordering the snapping of Yusuf before his handing over to police alive (Segun, 2011). It was amidst such suspicions between the Muslims and Christians about Boko-Haram that the then President Goodluck Jonathan in a church service in Abuja lamented that churches had been the worst hit of Boko-Haram and vowed to defeat the group by all mean Africa research bulletin 19533 (2012).

The continued escalation of Boko-Haram violence despite rigorous and sustained fight of the violence by the government and its allies indicated the needs for the government and all the stakeholders concern to carefully study and clearly understand the genesis of Boko-Haram and its drivers. As far back as 2012 some diplomats in the country are doubtful about the extent of which the sect has external links, disputing official assessments of the group by the country official as self-serving way of raising money for the security services intended to use it for another political aim (Africa Bulletin, 1533, 2013). This is because for fight against insurgency to succeed it needs the understanding of its real causes for instance, no real meaning and solution of any counterinsurgency could succeed without reference to its genuine causes (Galula, 1956:3). Since 2009 when Nigeria police launched their fight and later by Nigeria's army fight against Boko-Haram the sect has continued to become more dangerous with their somewhat sophisticated and indiscriminate attacks against the Nigerian population.

These and other reasons make many to believe that Boko-Haram is an apologue and a sensation that is nothing other than camouflage for criminals, corrupt politicians and people with evil intentions to disrupt and shattered the country (Egbeleke, 2013). On the other hand, politicisation, and branding of Boko-Haram violence to religion, ethnic and other primordial sentiment make it difficult for government to devise clear strategies to deal with the actual problem especially at the beginning and middle of the crisis. And the speed with which the group developed its capability suggests outside help. Suggesting that Boko-Haram has allies in other global insurgency movements across the Sahel. It is an established fact that many scholars have already questioned the suitability and effectiveness of the kind of tactics normally used in counterinsurgency fight in a problem such as Boko-Haram for instance, scholars such as Kienscherf (2011) and Weinstein (2007) has maintained that any strategy in the counterinsurgency that could not guarantee and prevent the loss of innocent lives such counter-terrorism operations can instead of reducing or stopping the insurgency fuel the violent and capable of transforming it to another dimension, making the country and overall civilian population and government agencies more vulnerable to indiscriminate attacks by the sect.

The central focus of this paper is to study the impact of ethnic Jingoism, religious manipulation and the politicisation of Boko-Haram. These factors make Boko-Haram phenomenon so complex that it requires critical thinking before it will be well understood. The paper is in five but related parts; part one introduced the study, part two addresses the theoretical and conceptual issues where concepts such as ethnicity, religious manipulation and politicisation of Boko-Haram have been clarified. While part three discusses the role of corruption in escalating Boko-Haram, part four conclude the study and give recommendation.

Theoretical Issues

Many concepts that are relevant to this paper need to be well-defined: Religious manipulation, Boko-Haram, Politicisation and Corruption. Similarly, the linkage between these concepts and Boko-Haram need to establish. The phenomenon of terrorism is highly contextual. Indeed, political violence in Nigerian history reaffirm the old maxim that "all politics is local". The word terrorism sound simple and seem easily understood the fact on ground but it is really the opposite. The word terrorism is a multifaceted that recent war on terror by American make it more subjective this led to many scholars to studied and debated for several decades. In fact, the concept attracted many dozens of opposing explanations, among both scholars, policymakers and government agencies as well. One thing that is constant with terrorist attacks anywhere in the world is that it 'do not occur in a vacuum,' but are instead terrorism is a product of complex interactions between individuals, organizations, and environments (7). Different people and organisation have many kinds of definition which primarily influence by their ideological orientations and their objective which is mostly political in nature like ethno-nationalism, left-wing and religious etc. Terrorism occurs within different kind of contexts. This section will review some theories used by other scholars to analyse the activities of Boko-Haram with the view of arriving at the proper explanation of the impact of ethnicity jingoist, religious manipulation and politicisation of Boko-Haram in Nigeria.

Poverty is one of such numerous theories put to examine the menace of Boko-Haram in Nigeria this theory as argue by Liolio (2013), is that Boko-Haram members recruitment was easy and successful in the north east because the success of recruitments of this nature in any area depend on the nature of the economic and poverty level in the area mostly insurgent gain members by claiming their struggle is for the people and that they would provide basic necessity for the general population if supported. From this view point the sect is likely to succeed if such areas where insurgency is taken place is permeated by poverty, illiteracy, ineptitude, corruption, discrimination to modernization and globalization, which create artificial poverty to many underdeveloped countries, such countries would become recruitment target of the terrorists. It is clear from this perspective that most of the root causes of insurgency like Boko-Haram is usually relate to a deep-seated problem that has been there in the society for long, it was these set of problems that mostly culminate into uncontrolled grievances and its subsequent exploding into uncontrolled violence. The claim of this theory has to some extent prove correct when it was reported that the part where Boko-Haram has been operating has the highest figure of relative poverty in comparison other zones. While northeast and north-west zones have the higher figure of 76.3% and 77.7% relative poverty, the south-west and south-east zones have 67.0% and 59.1% respectively (NBS, 2012). As a result, unemployment especially in the north has continued to increase despite the abundant human and natural resources available in area (Adebayo, 2014; Shu'aibu, Salleh and Shehu, 2015). Other scholars such as utilise four key factors as a framework for studying the underpinning factors for the group activities such as massaging, strategy, membership and support networks. For this theory messaging could be utilised to evaluate what boko-haram says to determine what group has wanted to project about the conflict and what influences have been present in its messaging content. Strategy- this revolves around how Boko-Haram has choosing to carry out its violence activities. The factor underlying strategic shifts in tactics, target and location and type attacks can explain where Boko-Haram has focused its attention and why.

Ethnicity Jingoist and Boko-Haram

Even though Nigeria as a country was able to survive problems ranging from civil war to other minor violence, considering the foundation upon which Nigeria was founded by Lugard in 1914, it is perhaps argued that the country is still leaving on the time bomb. For instance, apart from comment from the religious and other section of the population before and after independence the most serious about it was the changing dimension of the ethnic politics to more violence reaction as well as taking chance under ethnic banner by criminal gangsters, politicians and conflict entrepreneurs to perpetrate atrocities and shifted the blame on government. While comment from the so-called nationalist before and after independence was of serious concern what is happening now is more alarming. For instance, Awolawo initially did not considered Nigeria as a single unified country when he argued that "Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression…" this statement has continued to play a great role in complicating the project Nigeria like a sort of creed (David-West, 2012). Nigeria's people histories and different in their backgrounds, in their religious beliefs and customs has continued to jeopardise the pretended unification efforts by British colonial masters toward the end of their rule. That is why still Nigerians hardly show any sign of willingness to unite with still some people holding the view that Nigerian unity is only a British intention for the country (Balewa in the Legislative Council, 1948).

As noted earlier, Nigeria has hundreds of ethnic groups, three of which dominate specific "zones" of the country: Hausa-Fulani in the northwest and northeast, Igbo in the southeast and south central, and Yoruba in the north central and southwest. Ethnicity in Nigeria has a significant impact on a person's experiences, perceptions of injustice, social and educational opportunities, and much more. Nigerians in general are very conscious of their ethnic identity to the extent that most Nigerians can tell a person's background just from looking at or listening to them. Samuel Ibaba, belief that "politicization of ethnic consciousness" arisen due to the nature and manner under which colonial masters managed the country affairs, the divisive and divide and rule tactics have made ethnic groups to seriously engaged in competition for power to advance their group and parochial interests as against the national interest or public good. State laws and policies thus reflected ethnic interest." Indeed, ethnic identity direct and control the affairs of Nigerian from person's place of birth, applying for a driver's permit, university admission and opening a bank account all these require them to indicate their place of birth, not where they currently live, regardless of how long they have lived there.

Therefore, many scholars such as Philip Ostien notes, the distribution of resources is controlled, by a system of "indigene certificates" issued by local governments. While ethnicity and religion amplify some of the structural disadvantages described above, the difference between indigenous and non-indigenous settlers contributes greatly to underlying conflicts and grievances throughout Nigeria Nigerians' structural and socio-political emphasis on ethnic identity is a core challenge to the future security and prosperity of their country. All these have led to a failure to create a national consciousness, a universal patriotism across Nigeria. According to Abdul Mustapha: Since 1966, the efforts at reforming inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria have had only a limited success. . . It has been relatively easier to broaden

ethnic representation in the executives and legislatures than to create genuine structures of social inclusion. This problem is even more obvious in the organization of political parties, where efforts at wider representation remain subject to manipulation by the more powerful ethnic groups.104

Ethnic jingoists inspired or propelled towards isolationism, parochialism and chauvinism and being cocky because of misplaced cocksureness of the future based on ill-informed present must remember that it is much easier to destroy than to build. (Tam David-West P.36). in his submission Liman Ciroma (1999) argues that the inter-communal and religious upheaval of recent years, the ever growing demands for more emirates and chiefdoms, the almost insatiable demands for more local governments and states, and sometimes it would seem, for even more nations; and ethnic jingoism that characterised our recent political impasses; all these would seem to point to a loss of faith in unity and a retreat to parochialism and particularism (cited in Tam David-West 2012:p 40). In spite of all these manifested hatred Okagbue Aduba is of the believed that "deep down nobody actually reasonably feels Nigeria should not be one" (Sunday This Day, 02 August 1998, page 3). In a similar vein, J. Bayo Adekanye, argue that "there is strong desire among the diverse elements in the country to remain together," he further argued that Nigerian should not be complaisant over our unity (Nigerian Tribune, 27 September 1992, p 9). But if Nigerians continued to be careless, reckless and indulge themselves with what Tam David-West called nonsense ethno-centric excesses and indiscretions, the future cordiality of the country will be put on hold across ethnic boundaries.

Religious manipulation: A Christians Perception of Islam and Boko-Haram

Among all the violence that Nigeria has witnessed religious clashes has been the most dangerous one in the country, this trend does not stop in Nigeria alone in the new millennium but even at global level in generally as it demonstrated in September 2001 American attack, these event to many have seem to reiterate Huntington's thesis of a 'Clash in Civilisations.' Though has been seriously challenged as well as supported, it is a fact that historically dynamic identity inclinations and religious factors has been central to conflict in most developing countries like Nigeria and where these primordial sentiments do not seem to be clearly seen, they are in one way or the other surface in the wider configurations and designs of belligerents of the modern conflicts. The reintroduction of Shari'ah in Muslims dominated areas in Nigeria depicted Islam and Christianity in a war like scenario since the year 2000. This coincided with the World Trade Center bombings in New York, in September 2001 and subsequent war on terror by America and its allies. This led to an average Christians in Nigeria to belief with the narrative of 'the bloody corridors' of Islam (Mang, 2014), the notion is more prevalent among the Christians in the north-central areas of Nigeria. The Jos crisis and other places in the north led to Christians in Nigeria to conclusively allege that a Muslim are pursuing an agenda to overwhelm a predominantly Christian area and by extension to Islamise the whole country.

Hence, the perceptions and subsequent presentation of Islam by the Western media and many secular groups around the world as bloody religion fuel the already bad perception

of Islam in Nigeria and this has continued to sow a seed of hatred among the hitherto peaceful community. Ignorant and misperception of Islam by it adversaries has been one of the major factors, Mang (2014) argued that interpretation of Islam in that direction by the Christian was either Christian followers ignored Christianity's own bloody past, or is a past which the average Nigerian Christian has hardly been educated about. Of recent Christianity in many secular countries, has come to awkwardly become anti-religious stance on their society and the institution of the state. Unlike Islam's theology, on the other hand, legitimately places it within the organs of society and state (Falola 1998). The placing religion on state and the society Islam has put itself in direct conflict with secularism in some countries and with both modernists and other religions. Therefore, in dealing with politics in Islam there should be considerations on the relationship between Islam, its history, and politics in societies as a whole (Hassan 2002).

In anyway, some scholars like Mang view the country religious conflict from the Huntington's clash point of view while for him it is a clash of civilisations, Abdu (2010) analysis of identities argues, that the problem in northern Nigeria is that of identities rather than that of civilisation. Similarly, many other authors such as (Ozigi & Ocho 1981; Turaki 1993; Logams 2004), have emphasise on identity distinction based on both ethnic and religious divides. For Christian scholars such as theologians, clergymen, and prominent northern Christian apologists, are of the views that colonial masters and after independence Islamic tradition has continued to enjoy protection and sustenance to the disadvantage of Christianity. The revival of Shari'ah with the return to democratic dispensation in 1999 make Nigerian Christians continuously busy postulating "many theories about its causes" (Ostien 2006: 221). Rather than spending more time to understand what the shari'ah is all about, to whom it is binding and its benefit or otherwise to the system. Nigerian Christians have continuously missed a chance to settle and negotiate with the Muslims "the place of Islamic law in Nigeria on reasonable, honourable, and stable terms by continuously fighting, from the time of Independence, against legislation which would have created a balance between the inherited British legal system and Shariah" (Ostien 2006: 224-229). It is therefore subjective to the perceptions Christians have of Muslim responses to, and accounts for, the insurgencies prompted by fundamentalists in the name of flag of Islam.

The coming of Boko-Haram which led to some incidents of bomb blasts in the Plateau state and their claimed responsibilities. Christians come to belief that Muslim have an agenda to dominate the Christian minorities through all mean including terror attack (The Messenger Voice 2012). This perception and the other growing threat of insecurity reinvigorated a new upsurge of indiscriminate violent attacks on Muslims and their properties in the Christian dominated community. Effort by peace loving people from both religion and from the government side to distance this from the religion became impossible as attested by some of the Christian leaders that "You cannot distinguish Islam from its politics, so how can you distinguish it from its violence. Last, (2012) argue, that the division within the sects and dogmas of these sects have caused more conflict within Islam than outside it. Contrary to popular views many of the attacks attributed to Boko Haram by the media, street talk or in daily discussion are neither claimed by Boko Haram's elusive 'spokesman' nor confirmed as such by the police (Murray Last, 2016). This indicate that criminal gangs, inter-communal feuds, provocateurs, conflict entrepreneurs and of recent political opponent as reported by a UK based NGO on the recent Plateau, Taraba and Zamfara cases have been identified as possibly responsible for specific attacks. Despite fact most of the Christian of recent have been described such internal problem and violent of Boko-Haram as 'plans gone awry', or 'confusion in the enemy's camp.' This is the real perception of mostly radical Christian sect

about the crisis of Boko-Haram. This has continued to happen even though evidences on ground indicate that Muslims and their communities suffered more from Boko-Haram activities. The idea is that even though it was true that more Muslims have died, it was only revealing of a mutual plan gone skewed owing to either clashes between politicians and contending ideologues. Media have also played their part in the birth, growth, and present nature of Boko Haram as argued by Ayoob 2008; Idris 2011 and Salkida 2011), for more detail on the role of media in framing Boko-Haram especially the newspapers see Okoro and Odoemelam, 2013. the Muslim *ummah* and their *ulama* in general has been accused of complexity in the Boko-Haram activities in this respect the growing silence from them encouraged to many especially non-muslim scholars and communities about violence against others which has turned to affect even the muslim ummah. The perception of Boko-Haram violence by some Christian's scholars and their communities that the sect violence is a Muslim personal matter violence they (Christians) should not drag into it, which led to a failure to find a common ground by the government to defeat the group from its inception.

The fact that many studies have been conducted and reports on the root causes of Boko-Haram that centred on deprivation, marginalisation and poverty as the main causes the existing hypotheses by Christians about 'Islamic tendencies'- therefore the violence perpetrated by the sect is on behalf of Islam, especially the northern brand of Islam (Mang, 2011). For Christians in the north and Nigeria in general is hardly to belief any narrative that Boko-Haram is a product of any sort of grievances that should affect them. That is why deprivation story as the causes of Boko-Haram in the northeast of the country is rejected by most of the Christians. In trying to demystify this narrative a Christian clergyman explain: "Poverty is like a common cloth in Nigeria; in fact, most Africans wear it, so they cannot bring the issue of too much poverty in their areas," (cited in Mang, 2011: p 97). This insinuation, which blossoms with the increased violence by Boko Haram, discounts the fact that Christianity as a religion has also had its bloody corridors, that similar accounts can be connected to Christianity

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Ibrahim (1991: 122-124) gives clear examples of these intra-religious crises which Muslims have been contending with for a long time. Christians have been aware of these and have, in most cases, been left out of them. After all, even Christian sects have these issues. But the disturbing issue has been the rhetoric and actions of Boko Haram against Christians.

Politicisation of Boko-Haram
Role of Corruption in escalating Boko-Haram
Conclusion
Recommendation

Reference

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